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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001788

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SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL ESTH HUB IN OMAN

REF: A) 04 MUSCAT 274 B) SANAA 918

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: EMBASSY ABU DHABI STRONGLY SUPPORTS ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND HEALTH HUB OFFICE IN OMAN TO PROVIDE PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY SUPPORT TO THE UAE AND THE WIDER GULF REGION. THE ENHANCED EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE HUB OFFICE WOULD ALLOW THE U.S. TO DEEPEN ITS TRADE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS IN THE UAE, AS WELL AS TO ENCOURAGE GREATER REGIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREAS OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION, WATER RESERVES AND MANAGEMENT, AND GULF-RELATED ISSUES OF OVERFISHING, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND OFFSHORE CONSTRUCTION. END SUMMARY.

TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT

2. (SBU) THE U.S. AND THE UAE ARE CURRENTLY NEGOTIATING A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT THAT CONTAINS A CHAPTER ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION. WE WILL NEED A WAY TO ENCOURAGE THE UAEG TO ENFORCE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS EFFECTIVELY. MORE COOPERATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, SCIENTIST EXCHANGES, AND INFORMATION SHARING WOULD GREATLY ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION GOALS OF AN FTA, AND A OMAN-BASED ESTH HUB OFFICE WOULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN FURNISHING THE EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THIS ENHANCED COOPERATION.

ENERGY CONSUMPTION

3. (SBU) PER CAPITA ENERGY CONSUMPTION IN THE UAE IS AMONG THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD. THE WORLD WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S 2004 LIVING PLANET REPORT LISTED THE UAE AS THE COUNTRY WITH THE LARGEST ECOLOGICAL IMPACT PER CAPITA, PRIMARILY FOR THE SIGNIFICANT AREA OF LAND REQUIRED TO ABSORB THE CO2 WASTE FROM FOSSIL FUELS. RESIDENTS USE LARGE AMOUNTS OF ELECTRICITY AND WATER TO REGULATE TEMPERATURE (THROUGH AIR CONDITIONING IN THE EXTREME HEAT OF SUMMER). THE FAST PACE OF INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEAVILY SUBSIDIZED ELECTRICITY AND WATER ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE HIGH PER CAPITA ENERGY CONSUMPTION.

WATER RESERVES AND MANAGEMENT

4. (SBU) THE UAE IS LARGELY A DESERT COUNTRY, AND AS SUCH, ITS GROUND WATER RESERVES ARE ONE OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES, AND ALSO PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION. THE UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY HAS BEEN OPERATING IN THE EMIRATE OF ABU DHABI SINCE 1991, MAINTAINING WELLS AND COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA ON FRESH WATER GROUND RESERVES. MAJOR STRESSES ON WATER RESERVES INCLUDE THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR, THE FORESTRIES PROGRAM, AND EXCESSIVE WATER USAGE. ALTHOUGH THE UAEG IS REVIEWING THESE PROGRAMS, IT NEEDS TO IMPROVE ITS MANAGEMENT OF GROUND WATER RESERVES.

5. (SBU) NEARLY ALL OF THE WATER PRODUCED IN THE UAE IS DESALINATED SEAWATER. THERE IS NO STRATEGIC RESERVE OF GROUND WATER OR DESALINATED WATER IN THE UAE, A POTENTIAL SECURITY CONCERN. THERE IS ONLY ENOUGH DESALINATED WATER IN THE PIPELINE TO SUPPLY ABOUT 3 DAYS OF WATER. THE UAE NEEDS TO DO MORE STUDY INTO THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH IMPACT OF DESALINATED WATER OVER THE LONG TERM. ANOTHER KEY AREA NEEDING MORE STUDY IS THE SCIENTIFIC EFFECTS OF AQUIFER RECHARGING USING DESALINATED WATER. AS THE NUMBER OF DESALINATION PLANTS CONTINUES TO INCREASE,

CONTINUAL MONITORING OF THE IMPACT OF THE PLANTS
THEMSELVES ON THE SEA (IN TEMPERATURE AND SALINITY)
IS NEEDED.

SUSTAINABLE HEALTH OF THE GULF

16. (SBU) OVERFISHING OF MARINE STOCKS IN THE PERSIAN GULF IS ANOTHER KEY ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY. CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE GULF ALSO HAS AN IMPACT ON THE MARINE STOCKS. LIKE MANY OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE UAE, OVERFISHING HAS A SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT SINCE MANY OF THE FISHERMEN ARE AMONG THE POOREST EMIRATI NATIONALS. PRESERVING THE INDUSTRY ALSO HAS CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RAPIDLY CHANGING POPULATION.

17. (SBU) FOUR HUGE OFFSHORE PROJECTS IN DUBAI HAVE STARTED CAUSING SOME CHANGES IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OF THE PERSIAN GULF, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM, AND SOME ENVIRONMENTALLY-CONCERNED RESIDENTS HAVE BEGUN RAISING CONCERNS. THE PALM ISLAND JUMEIRAH, A BILLION-DOLLAR-PLUS ARTIFICIAL ISLAND IN THE SHAPE OF A PALM TREE HAS REDUCED VISIBILITY, AFFECTED THE UNDERWATER FAUNA, AND EVEN CHANGED THE WATER FLOWS IN ITS VICINITY. THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES FOR THIS PROJECT INDICATE THAT THESE NEGATIVE EFFECT WILL BE SHORT-TERM, AND THAT EVENTUALLY THE VISIBILITY WILL INCREASE AND THE FAUNA WILL BECOME MORE DIVERSIFIED THAN BEFORE. THE CHANGE IN WATER FLOWS HAS LED TO MORE BEACH EROSION, BUT THE DEVELOPERS ARE TAKING STEPS TO PREVENT THIS, INCLUDING BY BUILDING PROTECTIVE BARRIERS. TWO OTHER PALM ISLANDS, AND 593,000 SQUARE FEET OF ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS CALLED THE WORLD, ARE ALSO PLANNED OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) ENHANCED ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND UAE WILL HELP ADVANCE U.S. POLICY GOALS ON FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS AND ENHANCE REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE GULF. AN ESTH HUB IN OMAN WILL BE ABLE TO INTEGRATE MANY ISSUES AFFECTING THE ENTIRE GULF REGION, SUCH AS ENERGY CONSUMPTION, DESALINATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT AND THE SUSTAINABLE HEALTH OF THE GULF. BY LEVERAGING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, INCREASING LINKS BETWEEN U.S. AND UAE SCIENTISTS, UNIVERSITIES, AND ORGANIZATIONS, AND BY PROVIDING THE TIME AND EXPERTISE ON THESE COMPLICATED ISSUES, AN ESTH HUB IN OMAN WILL FURTHER U.S. POLICY GOALS AND IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE UAE.

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